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SUBJECT: New Minister of Interior Furmanavicius Promises Continued Cooperation; Easier Residency Permit Process

REF: VILNIUS 1523

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¶11. (U) Summary: Ambassador Mull met with newly appointed Minister of Interior Ginteras Furmanavicius on December 21, 2004. Furmanavicius thanked the Ambassador for past U.S. efforts to train the Ministry's experts in border security and law enforcement. He stated his commitment to maintaining close cooperation with the U.S., noting that both countries face similar challenges in terms of terrorism, organized crime, and money laundering. The Ambassador raised concerns about Lithuania's residency permit process for U.S. citizens - particularly Fulbright Scholars - noting that such could act as a disincentive for U.S. investment in Lithuania. Minister Furmanavicius agreed to help work towards finding an acceptable solution, suggesting the Migration Office is ready to work with us to address this issue. In an effort to increase cooperation and bi-lateral government contacts, the Ambassador encouraged Minister Furmanavicius to make an early visit to the United States to meet with top federal law enforcement officials. End Summary

Maintaining the Status Quo: Good Cooperation; Continued Training

¶12. (U) Ginteras Furmanavicius became Minister of Interior on December 14, 2004, making him the fourth Minister of Interior in four years, and second in the last two. Although controversy clouded his appointment, with allegations swirling of his business dealings with an accused embezzler, Lithuania's investigative service has cleared Furmanavicius and there has been no additional evidence to substantiate these allegations (ref A).

¶13. (U) Receiving Ambassador Mull for his December 22, 2004 courtesy-call, Minister of Interior Ginteras Furmanavicius noted that we were the first foreign diplomats to meet with him, and, although only recently appointed, he was well aware of the excellent cooperation that has existed over the past several years between the USG and Lithuania's Ministry of Interior. He thanked the U.S. for the training and equipment it has provided, citing the radiological detection equipment at the airport and security equipment used in border security to help thwart WMD proliferation. Alluding to President Bush's speech during his visit to Lithuania, Furmanavicius pointed out that Lithuania and the U.S. have many mutual challenges to address - organized crime, terrorism, money laundering - and he intended to address these challenges with the same level of bi-lateral cooperation as his predecessors. Domestically, Furmanavicius's agenda focuses on increasing state security, while improving government services and decreasing the economic disparity between urban and rural regions.

¶14. (U) The Ambassador echoed the Minister's comments on USG-GOL cooperation in the area of law enforcement and border security, stating he looked forward to continued cooperation in the future. The Ambassador made specific mention of the police force used to guard the U.S. Embassy, noting that while the Ministry of Interior has cutback on overall security at embassies in Vilnius, the police still maintain a presence at the U.S. Embassy, helping ensure our security. He noted that law enforcement training has been one of the strongest areas of cooperation with the Ministry of Interior, and he hopes to build on the already successful programs the USG has undertaken with the GOL, namely undercover police work, post-blast training with the FBI, and security assessments of port security in Klaipeda and railroad security at the borders. As a way to increase cooperation and improve already excellent bi-lateral relations, the Ambassador encouraged Minister Furmanavicius to make an early visit to the U.S. to meet top law enforcement officials in Washington.

Residency Permits: A Sticking Point

15. (SBU) One area of concern the Ambassador raised with Minister Furmanavicius is the current GOL residency permit policy. He mentioned the large number of complaints he has heard from U.S. citizens regarding their attempts to obtain a residency permit, citing the often-confusing and lengthy process of acquiring a residency permit. The current process, the Ambassador noted, could act as a disincentive for U.S. investment in Lithuania, if U.S. investors have difficulty obtaining resident permits.

16. (SBU) The Fulbright Scholars are of particular concern. The Ambassador noted that they are in Lithuania for an academic year, but must wait a considerable amount of time before receiving their visas, often longer than 90 days, when they become out of status and must leave the country or face fines. The Ambassador mentioned that the Fulbright program is a government sponsored program and would hope the Migration Office could ensure that the Fulbright scholars receive their visas before the 90-day temporary residence period expires. The Ambassador cited the bi-lateral program the GOL has in place with the French government and hopes that the U.S. Embassy can work with the Migration Office to establish a similar program. Minister Furmanavicius stated he was well aware of the U.S. concerns regarding residency permits and would do everything possible to solve the problem and make it easier for U.S. citizens to come to Lithuania to study, invest or live. He suggested we contact the Migration Office directly, as they are prepared to talk with the U.S. in order to solve this problem.

Comment

17. (SBU) Minister Furmanavicius seems prepared to continue the close cooperation his predecessors have forged with the USG, with his list of priorities offering specific areas where the USG can offer training and support, namely in state security. He realizes the importance of maintaining good relations and has taken note of the residency permit issue and seems willing to address it promptly. We will explore options for bringing Furmanavicius to Washington in the future.

MULL